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Spanish Language and Literature. 60.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlangspanish/60>

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MODES OF BEING IN GABRIEL MIRO'S *EL ANGEL, EL MOLINO, EL CARACOL DEL FARO*

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El ángel, el molino, el caracol del faro is (at least in the first four of its five parts) a kind of modern *Calila e Dimna*, a collection of fables, parables, fantasies and legends. It contains twenty *estampas*, five under the heading «Estampas rurales,» three «Estampas de cuentos,» three «Estampas del agua, del río y del mar,» five «Estampas de un león y una leona,» and four «Estampas del faro,» all of which appeared individually in Barcelona's *La Publicidad* between February 7, 1919 and October 6, 1920. The collection seems to be an anomaly among the other secular works that Miró published in the late teens and early twenties; the last sections of *Libro de Sigüenza* (1914), *El humo dormido* (1918) and *Años y leguas* (1921, 1922) have readily recognizable autobiographical and philosophical overtones throughout, exploring the themes of time, memory, existence and language. However, *El ángel* also employs an autobiographical voice in two strategic sections (the eleventh *estampa* at the exact center of the book and the last four *estampas*). A close examination of these autobiographical parts reveals a philosophical theme that unlocks the philosophical intent of the stories and fables.

Miró diverts the ancient literary forms of fable, parable, legend and fantasy from their traditional moral or escape purposes, in order to explore the nature of being. The philosophical core of the book is thus ingeniously masked by the childlike genres employed—the most literary or «unrealistic» modes. And even when the autobiographical voice does appear, it is the voice of a child, in keeping with the children's literature genres found in the

rest of the book. This, however, is a thinking child, who, in the course of a day and a night at a lighthouse (significant location!), claims to have «pensado todo.»¹ Under the tutelage of the old lighthouse keeper, the boy Gabriel «se pasmaba, sintiendo la delicia infantil de su asombro bajo la palabra y la mirada buena del torrero,» who has a «sonrisa y ademanes pálidos de bibliotecario» (p. 769). Is the old lighthouse keeper in fact a librarian, a kind of guardian of the foregoing tales and fantasies, or are the tales born of the boy's own imagination? The narrative source of the tales is not revealed, but what I wish to show here is that they are incarnations of the truth discovered by the child the day before he claims to have «thought through everything.» He states that truth as follows: «Las cosas se articulan a la vida de nosotros; se hinchon como una vena de la circulación del instante del recinto que nos conmueve; abren la distancia de nuestra conciencia...» (p. 770).

Each tale seems to test some facet of this truth and in so doing tests the power of literature to make present certain modes of being without bracketing that presence in philosophical language. The underlying paradigms of the animal stories and tales of princesses, princes and talking rivers posit three modes of being-in-the-world: perception, function and context (place), all interrelated and dependent on a subject/object relationship (perceived and perceiver, thing and user, thing and place). What the angel, the mill and the conch shell have in common are their dependence on their location, their function and another entity's perception of them for their existence. In other *estampas* (especially the second and the fifth parts) a displacement of an entity dooms its existence. Finally the perceived existence, function or relationship is made present through some kind of expression or articulation (a language).

Gonzalo Sobejano (the only critic to give serious attention to *El ángel*) says it is the most poetic of Miró's works: «Su misión, concentrar lo disperso en la vida plena de la palabra, la realiza ejemplarmente en esta colección de estampas, donde como en toda su obra, pero en grado máximo, se demuestra poeta lírico, distanciando de la concreción social e histórica inmediata para comprender de manera absoluta, en soledad conmovida, el latido unánime de la totalidad en el hombre.»² Sobejano then centers his analysis on the preponderance of the word *todo* in the work and the types of situations in which it is employed in order to project that «totality.» The present study concurs with Sobejano's but goes beyond the usual sense of poetic (Sobejano specifies lyrical) to

locate Miró in the tradition of the poets (e.g., Hölderlin and Stefan George) found by Heidegger to use poetic language for an ontological purpose.

This identification seems appropriate since Miró's (or the boy Gabriel's) discoveries about the world in the book seem very close to Heidegger's when he says: «We must first think the relation between world and thing as a unity. But the world and thing are not merely 'coupled' to one another, rather they 'penetrate' one another to the extent that they may be described as 'thingworld' and world-thing.»³ Poetizing for Heidegger is not limited to literature: «Poetizing establishes by making entities 'secure' through words, by naming entities as things and eliciting the ontological relations between one thing and another.»⁴ For Heidegger a word in a dictionary is nothing—out of context it is only a residue. But on the other hand «Within the spatio-temporal sphere the world determines the thing to be a thing.»⁵

Let us now turn to several of the fables or stories to see how Miró's innovative philosophical enterprise is carried out. Perception and being are the focus of «El molino» the first *estampa* of the collection. The canvas covered blades of the mill are first seen in motion, blending in a whirl as one entity: «Las seis alas se juntan en una para los ojos...» (p. 735). As the wind dies, the blades slow and the ants below see that one of the blades has a patch; the moralistic nature of the traditional fable genre asserts itself when an ant declares: «¡Válgame! ¡Tanta vanagloria, y con un remiendo!» (p. 735). But the piece is not about vanity; rather it focuses on perception and truth: «Pero es verdad; una tiene un remiendo, y cuando todas volaban el remiendo florecía de color suave de trigo y de miel en la blacura de las otras alas» (p. 735). The wind resumes and again sets the blades in motion, allowing the mended blade to hide its shame: «La veja remendada esparce gloriosamente su color maduro de sol en la corona de blancura que tejen sus mellizas sobre el cielo» (p. 736). But the ants, privy to the secret of the mended tear, know the full truth (which is only a perceptual truth part of the time). In this instance truth is perception and memory revealed in verbal expression. The windmill sings «—¡Buen día y pan!» (p. 736), and the ants reply «—Bueno. Pero ¡cuando te pares..., que te has de parar...!» (p. 736). Perception and expression combine to inform truth.

Several segments of the first section explore the nature of things in their function and thus their relation to human existence.

In «Un camino y el niño del maíz» three people use a road. A workingclass child stops a moment to play with several children of higher social status in their roadside gardens. A traveler evokes the road's meaning in terms of distance: «se le oye pararse mirando el camino, la distancia apretada,» (736) and a businessman in a hurry uses the road as a shortcut. Only the child carrying corn bears the knowledge of the world outside to the inside of the sheltered gardens of the wealthier children; they do not want him to leave with his superior knowledge. The little parable seems to suggest that knowledge is perception in space. The traveler's presence evokes the following question from the children: «¿Cómo se desea preguntarle al caminante si va muy lejos, y después verle y oírle, anda que andará, anda que andará!» (p. 737).

«Las campanas» which closes the first section of the «Estampas rurales» combines two modes of being—perception and function. It is a voluptuous evocation of the perceptual qualities of the bells in the lives of the village people. They mutually create each other through perception. In closing the cycle of the rural pieces, the bells refer back to the road of the second piece as the bells sympathize with the road («lo mira compadeciéndose la 'Campana-Madre-1766'» [p. 740]). They are both tied for their existence on the human use of them: «Al anochecer, parece que los caminos vuelven a los pueblos» (p. 740). The bells derive all their dimensions from their function in the town: they are happiness on feast days; they are time and peace, and the town *is* its bells: «Esparcen la sensación de vida del pueblo» (p. 741). Actually it is the voice of the bells, their «speech» that defines the existence of the village: «De verdad no se despierta hasta las doce; y, aun entonces, trajina muy poco; habla lo preciso, dejando caer nueve palabras, las nueve campanadas del Ave María que se abren y pasan imprimiendo una caliente quietud en la ciudad, en las heredades, en la labranza, en el camino desválido» (p. 740). And finally the old bellringer exists for the townspeople only in his function as bellringer. In their perception of him, he has no other life outside his function: «las gentes creen que lo único que hace el campanero es tocar las campanas» (p. 742).

The first section of *estampas* tests the notion of existence as perception and function; the second («Estampas de cuentos») explores existence in space (although this is not to say that there are not allusions to the other modes of existence). In each *estampa* or legend of this section, a displacement of an entity (an angel, a

prince and an artist's soul) occurs. An angel is allowed to return to earth and then refuses to abandon his earthly abode to return to heaven after fulfilling his soul-gathering mission. The angel feels at home in the worldly surroundings: «Va saliendo la luna. Hay luna llena; y el mar, y los jardines, y las montañas, y los senderos solitarios, y hasta la frente y las tristezas de los hombres, y las manos, la mirada y la boca de la mujer, y el pensamiento de la muerte, todo adquiere una inocencia, una intimidad, una perfección inefable... ¡qué dulce es sentirnos cerca del cielo desde la Tierra!... ¡No, Querubín; yo no subo! Díselo a Nuestro Señor. No hay obra suya que más se ame y que más nos posea que este mundo» (p. 745).

In the next *estampa* «El cadáver del príncipe» a robber takes pity on the body of a dead prince, squeezed unnaturally into its finery. He removes the body from the clothes and presumably carries it off to some more natural resting place than the casket of gold prepared for it. On discovering the robbery, the officials angrily murder the man who openly admits having taken the royal cadaver. The robber's body is then placed in the casket to satisfy the need for a corpse during the ceremonies. Nobody suspects that the royal casket contains anything but a princely corpse: «salían músicos y lloros, y la inspiración descendió a la frente de los poetas del reino» (p. 749). The truth as perceived and expressed in poetry will be that the prince's body rests in the royal gold casket.

In «La cabeza de piedra, su alma y la gloria» a sculpted head, filled with the soul of its creator pines away in a dark corner of a church. It envies the gargoyles that are gloriously displayed for all to see and admire. The sculpture is finally «discovered» by an art expert and taken to a museum, but rather than the longed-for glory, the soul of the creator that infused it dies. The lifeless sculpture is doomed to an eternity of staring at an ash-colored wall with the sign «Se prohíbe escupir» (p. 752).

Death out of context is also the pattern of the fourth set of *estampas* «El león y la leona.» The royal beasts, which have established their territory at a desert oasis, allow some crows to trick them into seeking the jungle. They are instead taken to the sea—an unnatural setting for them, and there they are captured and interned in a zoo. They believe they have arrived at the jungle (the appropriate animals are there), and the lion's view of his world conforms to his expectations: «—¡Qué lástima, amiga mía; qué lástima que la pobre selva esté enjaulada!» (p. 768). Having never

seen the jungle, the jungle becomes whatever experience he does have, and so he names it. His skeptical companion thinks resignedly: «¡Ahora este león ya no tiene remedio!» (p. 768).

The third section of the book, «Estampas del agua, del río y del mar» continues the fantasy mode with the pieces «El agua y la infanta» and «El río y él,» but concludes the section with an autobiographical voice in «El mar: el barco,» as though the relationship thing/world, entity/context prepared for in the earlier sections were now ready to be tried on the human condition. Through imagery the first two pieces underscore the subject/other relationship. Other or outside world is what gives meaning to being: «Agua y luna se abrazan desnudas, inocentes y necesitadas la una de la otra para la misma belleza» (p. 753). But the narrator questions whether that is all there is to existence: a subject/object exchange. No, he decides, there is a physical existence outside the relationship: «fuera de este encanto, es una 'cosa química'.» But immediately the subject/world relationship is reaffirmed: «El agua que de ella misma baja por las cuevas y corre y trajina por el mundo, no es ella, sino de ella; es como la llama prendida de otra llama, y ya no será más que lo que el cauce quiere que sea; grande, angosta, impetuosa, sosegada, según el camino. El alma del agua sólo reside en la tranquila plenitud de su origen» (p. 753).

Subsequent images underscore this relationship. Cypress trees along a path are observed to sink their «filo en el cielo del agua, dejándole una emoción de inmensidad y una sombra morada, nazarena» (p. 753). A *madronal* achieves a sense of its beauty thanks to the water: «Entonces, todo adquiere el misterio de la vida de la emoción suya. Es ya la belleza contemplada; es el concepto y la fórmula de una belleza que se produce en esa soledad como en el alma del hombre, y el agua es como una frente que ha pensado este paisaje. Paisaje junto al agua clara, desnuda; paisaje sumergido y alto, ¡cómo te tiembla y se te dobla el corazón en la faz y en las entrañas del agua!» (p. 753). Toward the end of the *estampa* the princess laments not being happy like the water, but the water perceives itself to be even more tragic than the princess. It can never be thirsty; that is, it can never be anything but itself, can never get outside itself to know how it affects others. Its self-knowledge is restricted to feeling its relationship to other things in its world.

That notion is carried further in «El río y él» where the river is followed from its origins as a small, rushing brook to its dissolution in the sea. From its beginnings the river loved itself; it is the reflec-

tion of everything in the world: «Lo cantaban los poetas; las mujeres sonreían complacidas en sus orillas; los jardines palpitaban al verse en sus aguas azules; los cielos se deslizaban acostados en su faz; la nieblas le seguían dejándole sus vestiduras, y rajaba la luna, toda desnuda, y se desposaba con cada gota y latido de su corriente» (p. 759). Before it becomes the river it can reflect nothing: «No veía ni poetas, ni mujeres, ni jardines. Nada» (p. 755). In its maturity «El verdadero río era un lírico de bien» (p. 755), the lyric, the poetic word, having the power to capture everything: «Quizás fuese tan bueno en fuerza de amarse tanto, porque se amaba amándolo todo en sí mismo» (p. 754). The river grows and gains knowledge «ávido de saber, callado y sutil, traspasaba laminándose la carne tierna de las márgenes...» (p. 755). But when the river arrives at the sea (death) its knowledge ends. It has experienced everything, but at the moment of death it realizes it has not experienced itself «y el río se retorció angustiadamente, mirándose a sí mismo, mirándose él sin conocerse. Y se hundió en el mar...» (p. 756). Existence in the case of the river is its interaction with the world that surrounds it. Self-knowledge out of that context is impossible.

Human existence was insinuated in the «El río y él» parable through reference to Jorge Manrique's metaphor of life as a river that flows to the sea of death. And finally, in the last *estampa* of the section (the eleventh of the entire work as indicated earlier) the autobiographical «yo» asserts itself to transfer the observations about the nature of things in the world to human truth. The subject in the subject/object or subject/world relationship is immediately affirmed in the first word of the passage: «Mi ciudad está traspasada de Mediterráneo» (p. 756). As a transition between the aforementioned animal and fantasy representations of the philosophical idea, the central viewer's world is first seen in reciprocal terms: «El olor de mar unge las piedras, las celosías, los manteles, los libros, las manos, los cabellos. Y el cielo de mar y el sol de mar glorifican las azoteas y las torres, las tapias y los árboles. Donde no se ve el mar se le adivina en la victoria de luz y en el aire que cruje como un paño precioso» (p. 756). The narrator next incorporates himself perceptually into his surroundings: «En mi ciudad, desde que nacemos, se nos llenan los ojos de azul de las aguas. Ese azul nos pertenece como una porción de nuestro heredamiento...» (p. 756).

The rest of the piece is devoted to a specific morning in which

the narrator experiences his relationship to the sea: «Un contacto de creación desnuda que calaba la piel y la sangre. Carne de alma, y el alma como un ala comba, vibrante, dolorida y gozosa de doblarse y distenderse, pero hincada en la pena» (p. 757). It is a moment of conscious existence, of total compenetration of human entity and its surrounding world: «La mirada y el afán cogidos en nuestra vida...Y el cielo y el mar se levantaban delante de nuestra frente, se alzaban tendidos, sensitivos y duros.» Man is his place, although this place exists before and after the human presence in it: «La angustia de imaginarnos el mar sin nosotros, cuando no vivíamos y cuando no viviremos» (p. 757). But without us the sea is only a concept: «De pronto tuvimos la conciencia de la soledad; de la soledad de nuestra cuerpo, de su latido caliente junto a la soledad de las aguas, soledad que no es estado como en nosotros, sin un concepto sin relación humana, y se avivó el de eternidad sin nosotros, el de la naturaleza sublimada en sí misma» (p. 757).

We are our perceptions and our actions (function) in this space: «Parece que nada más seamos nuestros ojos, como si en la visión estuviéramos también nosotros hechos ya de naturaleza separada, fuera de la nuestra de criatura; proyectados encima del mar, en sensación de mar» (p. 575). This notion is affirmed with irony at the end of the piece when the narrator tries to «capture» the sea upon sighting a boat, an entity that has greater powers over the sea than human perception. But that ruse does not work because the boat, rather than serving as an instrument by which the perceiver can take possession of the sea (symbolically) carrying his soul to the great beyond («De un brinco se metió mi corazón en el barco»), the boat approaches the perceiver and docks at the shore: «El mar era mío desde el barco. Pero el barco no se marchaba, sino que venía al puerto de mi ciudad» (p. 758).

In order to preserve existence the narrator has recourse to words: «Apreté dentro de palabras lo que yo más amaba, lo que creí más mío; y las pronuncié y se me deshacían, y para no perderlas las escribí en piedras con un esfuerzo recóndito, como si las tallase; y no las arrojé, sino que las puse en la faz de las aguas, y al sumergirse sentí un ruido de ascua y de corazón.» This moment of interpenetration through perception and expression is limited in time: «Lo inmenso iba a ser un instante recordado. Las piedras de palabras nunca serían realizadas» (p. 757). But this moment is existence nonetheless: «el mar palpitaba gloriosamente con pobre vida mía» (p. 757).

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Miró seems to find, as does Heidegger later, that the sea is one of the most valuable poetic entities for illuminating memory. The constant give and take of subject and object in the memory process is suggested in the perennial movement of the sea, and the sea is a reminder of the search for being through things:

The sea as sea becomes the appearance of the sea as the giver and taker of memory. The poetized sea thus becomes a temporal as well as a spatial entity: it is the earthly counterpart to the time involved in remembering the past in the present and the movement required to transcend the present and recall that moment in the past which is to be remembered. The reason for remembering is poetized as the shore to be reached, the approaching boundary, the source of the moment for which the act of remembering was initiated.... Memory is of *one* time just as the immediate configuration of waves is of *one* sea.⁶

In the last four *estampas* which take place at the lighthouse, the conch shell, which discloses the sound of the sea when held to the ear, is indeed memory. The lighthouse keeper's wife recalls her drowned son by listening to the sound of the sea in the dead boy's favorite conch shell which is kept in an honored place to the left of his photograph. Perception and place are fused in this segment when the young visitor to the lighthouse one day mixes up the conch shell placed to the right and that on the left. For the bereft mother (unaware of the displacement) the left-hand shell continues to represent her son (another version of the displaced prince story). This final section recapitulates other aspects of the philosophical underpinnings of the book. Perception and truth are suggested when the narrator discovers that what he thought to be a star is in reality another lighthouse; the nature of that entity depends on his perception: «Seis millas entre dos estrellas me hubiese parecido una distancia fabulosa de siglos; entre dos faros era tenerlos en mis manos como dos antorchas» (p. 769).

The unity of voice between the autobiographical sections and the «literary» (fables, parables, etc.) ones is hinted in the imagery that opens the final segment. The lighthouse is described as «teniendo sus aspas de polvo de lumbre, y alguna vez las traspasa un buho, un autillo, que rebota loco y cegado por el relámpago de su

cuerpo» (p. 768), recalling the chief feature of the windmill of the first segment of the book, and «la vía láctea parece recién molida en la tajona de claridad del faro» (p. 769).

Water images serve to unite the middle and final sections underscoring the interdependence of things or man and his world for existence. In the «El agua y la infanta» section, the narrator establishes a relationship between perceiver and water that is repeated in the final section:

Después, el agua se queda un momento ciega. Es un ojo de un azul helado, todo órbita vacía, inmóvil. ¿Se habría muerto para siempre esta pobre agua? Venimos muy despacio, como si nos llegásemos de puntillas a una mujer acostada que no se la oye respirar, que no tiene color, que no mueve los párpados, y, de pronto, salen los ojos ávidos, asustados; sale toda la imagen dentro de la quietud del agua ciega. Estamos allí del todo; está todo mirándose. Nos aguardaban. El agua se ha llenado de corazón, y el corazón de esta agua era la ansiedad de nosotros. (753)

And the boat in water image of the «El mar: el barco» (central section) and «La playa» (final section) reinforces subject/object movement. In «La playa» the boy echoes the «El mar: el barco» section analyzed above: «Lo /a boat/ esperamos casi por la amargura de ver como desaparece. Yo paso en 'ese' vapor y me veo a mí mismo, mirándome desde el peñascal de la torre. Y cada una de mí, se lastima del otro y se trocaría por el otro, y se quieren más que antes...» (p. 772).

Finally, all of the various modes of existence in the book and their expression arise from a situation of non-expression. Again Heidegger is illuminating, as he understands existence to emerge from the in-between, from the difference that a thing marks with its background or with what came before or after: «Things are defined in the world by the 'between'—'the difference.'»⁷ In language, one element of this difference is silence: «We name the soundless calling through which saying sets in motion and collects the world-relation-the peal of stillness.»⁸ Before the events of a particular afternoon on a particular country road take place, events that define the road and its relationship to those who use it, there is a general «quietud de los jardines en mediodía (p. 736). Before the

children feel the urge to ask the traveler his plans, «Todo calla menos el silencio,» and before the bell tolls marking the significant parts of the day for the village people, it is seen «todavía dormitando» (p. 740). Before the robber emerges to snatch away the prince's body, «la aldea respiraba buena y tranquila, y desde en medio del cielo la miraba la luna. Entonces se levantó en el valle un hombre que hacia crujir el silencio como un jaral...» (p. 747).

So, by means of the word or literary image and the literary genres—parable, legend, fable and fantasy—that most rely on language for their truth (i.e., have no referent in the «real» world), Miró creates in *El ángel, el molino, el caracol del faro*, a fiction that conveys philosophical truths as he understands them. Now we can see that, rather than a curiosity, *El ángel* is very much a part of Miró's literary cannon and is, in fact, best understood in light of *El humo dormido* (exploring truth and memory) written immediately before it and *Años y leguas* (the self in time and space)⁹ written just afterwards. *El ángel's* contribution to Miró's philosophical thinking within a literary context is to boldly assert the power of the word to understand existence and to contain it.

NOTAS

1. Gabriel Miró, *Obras completas* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1961), p. 769. All references to *El ángel, el molino, el caracol del faro* are from the same edition.
2. Gonzalo Sobejano, «Totalidad cósmica e integración humana en *El ángel, el molino, el caracol del faro*, de Gabriel Miro,» *Prisma/Cabal*, 5 (1979), 20.
3. «...es Dinge zur Welt und Welt zu der Dingen Kommen Heißt. Beide Weisen des Heißens sind geschieden, aber nicht getrennt. Sie sind aber auch nicht nur aneinander gekoppelt. Denn Welt und Dinge besthen nicht nebeneinander. Sie durchgehen einander. Hierbei durchmessen die Zwei eine Mitte. In dieser sind sie einig....Si spricht, indem sie das Geheißene, Ding-Welt und Welt-Ding....» (Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* Tübingen: Neske, 1960], pp. 24, 28. Paraphrased in English by David A. White, *Heidegger and the Language of Poetry* [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1971], p. 64).
4. White, p. 128 paraphrases Heidegger's *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlin's Dichtung*,

4th ed., p. 148.

5. «Das Wort be-dingt das Ding zum Ding.» (Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 232, paraphrased in White, p. 29.)

6. White, p. 103 paraphrases Heidegger's *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlin's Dichtung*, p. 142.

7. «Die Innigkeit von Welt und Ding weist im Schied des Zwischen, weist im Unterschied.» (Heidegger, *Unterwegs*, p. 25 paraphrased by White, p. 64.)

8. «Wir nennen das lautlos rufende Versammeln, als welches die Sage das Welt-Verhältnis be-wägt, das Geläut der Stille.» (Heidegger, *Unterwegs*, p. 215, translated by White, p. 46.)

9. Please see my article «Time and the Elements Earth, Air, Fire, and Water in *Años y leguas*» in *Critical Essays on Gabriel Miró* (Lincoln: Society of Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1979).